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*Published in:*

Paper presented at the European Economic and Social History Conference in The Hague. February 26th - march 2nd, 2002.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*

Early version, also known as pre-print

*Publication date:*

2002

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Karel, E. (2002). Rural sociologists and their theories on the Dutch agricultural development after the Second World War. In *Paper presented at the European Economic and Social History Conference in The Hague. February 26th - march 2nd, 2002.*

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## **Rural sociologists and their theories on the Dutch agricultural development after the Second World War**

Paper presented at the European Economic and Social History Conference in The Hague. February 26th - march 2nd, 2002.

**Drs. Erwin H. Karel**

*This paper will describe in which way rural sociology has influenced the Dutch agriculture after the Second World War. It will be used as a part of a thesis about The Dutch Pilot-areas (1953-1970) that will be published in 2003. The paper doesn't aim to give a full picture, but concentrates on the ideas of E.W. Hofstee, B. Benvenuti en J.D. van der Ploeg. They have formulated clear thoughts about the so-called style of farming, but each one against the background of another time. The following themes will be brought up in this paper: modern culture pattern, style of farming, and the transition from a family business ideology towards an agricultural entrepreneur strategy. This last theme shows how sociological notions can be used in historical research. The working paper is a first reflection on the subject and open for debate.*

### **Introduction**

After the Second World War the influence of sociology on the Dutch society increased rapidly. At almost all universities Departments of Sociology were opened and their number of students rose steadily. Besides, every religious group created – in conformance with the Dutch political segregation – its own institute to perform sociological research.<sup>1</sup> The government founded a new Ministry of Social Welfare, in which the influence of sociologist was remarkably great. Municipalities established sociographic agencies that – usually under the direction of a sociologist – collected data about their inhabitants. The after war regional industrial development programme made use of the knowledge of sociologist to get farm labourers into the factories. Sociology didn't only grow as an academic discipline, but also as an applied science.<sup>2</sup> Her influence was correspondingly extensive.

The Wageningen Landbouwhogeschool (University of Agriculture Wageningen) didn't stay behind. It appointed the social scientist E.W. Hofstee as a professor in 1946. He founded a Department for Sociology.<sup>3</sup> Hofstee has had a tremendous influence on the rural sociology in The Netherlands. Without any doubt he can be called the founder of this scientific discipline in this country. Furthermore, as an advisor he had great influence on the Dutch agriculture policy. He developed theoretical concepts and used these as a guide for the creation of practical plans. He was for example responsible for the draw up of plans for the so-called *pilot-areas* (*streekverbetering*) during the period 1953-1970. The execution of a rural development programme in these *pilot areas*, is the subject of my thesis. The programme aimed to improve the life of small farmers and their families in social-economic backward areas. It was initiated by the government and executed with the support of farmer unions. By means of extensive advisory farmers and their families

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. A. Doorn, *Beeld en betekenis van de moderne sociologie* (Utrecht 1964).

<sup>2</sup> E. Snel, *De vertaling van wetenschap. Nederlandse sociologie in praktijk* (Utrecht 1996).

<sup>3</sup> J. van der Haar, *De geschiedenis van de landbouwuniversiteit Wageningen. II verdieping en verbreding, 1945-1970* (Wageningen 1993).

were educated on technical issues, on housekeeping and on themes concerning their positions in modern society. At the same time land consolidation programmes were executed which should improve the working conditions for farmers. This *rural development programme* can be considered as a form of social engineering.<sup>4</sup>

My thesis will be constructed around three major themes: the political implications that came up when the programme was initiated and executed, the realisation of the programme in about 140 local areas and the scientific/ideological background of the concept. I will limit myself to the last theme in this paper. But first two comments have to be made.

1. The subject of the thesis has been partly inspired by actual developments. About ten years ago a discussion appeared about so-called *rural renewal*. Basically it concerns the rearrangement rural environment or the redistribution of rural space between agriculture, nature, urban development and recreation.<sup>5</sup> The realisation of the rural development programme in the fiftieth and sixtieth was also a form of renewal of life and work in the country. In those days agriculture was the dominant economic activity. Nowadays this has definitely changed, but there are still some similarities. One of them is the active participation of rural sociologist in the process of renewal. Just like in former days they try to adapt the style of farming to future circumstances. This paper focuses on the way they create(d) ideas about such an adaptation. It limits itself to the work of three – in time each other succeeding – sociologist, namely Evert Hofstee, Bruno Benvenuti and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg.
2. There has also to be made a comment about the three ways in which I encounter sociologist during my research. First I meet them in the actual discussion concerning the rural renewal, because they argue for a diversification of the agricultural economy, partly on the basis of historical considerations. Secondly I use their theories to analyse the rural development programme in the pilot-areas of the fiftieth and sixtieth. And thirdly I also meet them as historical actors, as scientist who tried to influence the developments in the Dutch agricultural politics with their scientific work. This threefold encounter makes the story sometimes complex. Therefore I have decided to consider them in the first part of this paper primarily as historical actors. At the end I will show that there is also a relation on the level of exchange theories. I will mostly leave out the actual (political) discussions.

### **Modern culture pattern**

E.W. Hofstee's influence on rural sociology has been extensive. Before the Second World War he studied in the tradition of the Dutch sociography. Sociography is a fusion of the words *sociology* and *geography*. S. Steinmetz introduced this discipline in the Netherlands in the twentieth of the past century as an alternative for the German sociology, which in his opinion was too theoretical and too much inclined in politics. He defined sociography as: "Sie kann angedeutet werden als die Beschreibung mit allen Mitteln von alle Verhältnissen und Zuständen eines Volkes zu einer bestimmten Zeit. Wie die Geschichte das Werden, so schildert die Soziographie das Sein aller

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<sup>4</sup> E. H. Karel, 'De illusie van het maakbare platteland. Streekverbetering 1956-1970', in: P. Kooij e.a. (red.), *De actualiteit van de agrarische geschiedenis* (Groningen 2000) 65-98.

<sup>5</sup> Zie in dezen: P. Kooij, 'Van platteland naar groene ruimte', *Spil. Kritisch tweemaandelijks tijdschrift over landbouw, landschap, natuur, milieu en leven in het landelijk gebied*, afl. november/december 177-178(2001) 14-20.

Völker nach allen Richtungen ihrers Lebens und das ihrer Teile".<sup>6</sup> Steimetz wanted to collect an extensive set of data (economical, sociological, historical, cultural and so on) to analyse its patterns. In the fiftieth the so-called Dutch 'modern' sociology rejected this method as non-sociological, i.e. non-theoretically.<sup>7</sup> The idea that it is possible to collect data without a theoretical notion is indeed rather naïve, but one has to state that a theoretical basis wasn't lacking in the better-done sociographic research. Hofstee's thesis is a good example of that approach.<sup>8</sup> But the changing of the paradigm within sociology in the fiftieth left little room for nuances.

Sociography has been used, especially in the field of applied sociology, till the late sixtieth. Also in the rural sociology it has left its traces. Many of the report written by the Dutch Agriculture-Economic Institute for example are constructed on this basis. Worth mentioning is the regional approach of the research, which of Hofstee was a fervent advocate.<sup>9</sup> For historians these works stay fascinating, because they often – in accordance with the ideas of Steinmetz – analyse also historical data. Hofstee's work can be located in the area between sociography and 'modern' sociology. Later on he considered sociography as the empirical discipline of sociology, in other words sociography as the entrance hall to the more theoretical sociology. At the end of his career he tried to give the empirical sociography a theoretical superstructure in the form of his *differential sociology*.<sup>10</sup> Just after the Second World War however Hofstee was strongly influenced by the American *new sociology*. He visited the United States several times financed by the Marshall aid. The new sociology tried to develop research programmes to discipline citizens within society on the basis of questionnaires, interviews and attitude. In that sense it can be considered functionalistic.

Hofstee designed two theories that are in this paper of interest. The first is the theory of the modern culture pattern, the other the concept of style of farming. Both are partly closely connected. In short, the modern culture pattern tries to describe the transition from a traditional society into a modern industrial one. This transition influenced many parts of the lifestyle, for example the decrease of birth rate within families.<sup>11</sup> In this paper we are interested in the way Hofstee applied this theory on farmers life and agricultural economy. He assumed that there was a difference between two types of farmers: on the one hand the modern, progressive farmer with an open eye for change, on the other hand a traditional one who continued to build on the experiences of his predecessors. The modern farmer was often more individualistic, the traditional one more orientated on the local community.<sup>12</sup> Hofstee tested his theory in a historical case. He considered that the nineteenth century corn-farmers in the northern Dutch province Groningen, who had a prosperous life, belong

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<sup>6</sup> Geciteerd door: H. Heeren, *Van sociografie tot sociologie. De Amsterdamse sociografische school en haar betekenis voor de Nederlandse sociologie* (Utrecht 1993).

<sup>7</sup> J. A. A. Doorn en C. J. Lammers, 'Sociologie en sociografie', *Sociologische Gids* (1958) 49-78.

<sup>8</sup> E. W. Hofstee, *Oldambt, een sociografie, deel I: Vormende krachten* (Groningen/ Batavia 1937).

<sup>9</sup> E. W. Hofstee, *Rapport van de commissie inzake het streekonderzoek, ingesteld door het dagelijks bestuur van het Landbouw-Economisch Instituut* ('s-Gravenhage 1949).

<sup>10</sup> E. W. Hofstee, *Differentiële sociologie in kort bestek : schets van de differentiële sociologie en haar functie in het concrete sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek* (Wageningen 1982); E. W. Hofstee, H. M. Jolles en I. Gadourek, *Differentiële sociologie in discussie* ('s-Gravenhage 1985).

<sup>11</sup> E. W. Hofstee, 'De groei van de Nederlandse bevolking', in: A. N. J. den Hollander (red.), *Drift en Koers* (Assen 1962) 13-84.

<sup>12</sup> E. W. Hofstee, *Rural life and rural welfare in the Netherlands* (The Hague 1957); E. W. Hofstee, 'Over het modern-dynamisch cultuurpatroon', *Sociologische Gids* (1966) 139-154; R. Bergsma, *Op weg naar een nieuw cultuurpatroon, studie van de reactie op het moderne cultuurpatroon in de Dokkumer Wouden* (Assen 1963).

to the modern type. Today the modern culture pattern is less relevant as an explanatory theory. But as an object of research it still is, because it was applied in the pilot-areas. To illustrate this an experiment from 1953 in the pilot-villages Kerkhoven and Rottevalle will be described.

### **Pilot-villages**

There were experiments in Rottevalle (province of Friesland in the north of The Netherlands) and Kerkhoven (province of Noord-Brabant in the south of The Netherlands) before the rural development programme in the pilot-areas really started in 1956.<sup>13</sup> These experiments (with 25-30 families in each community) were inspired by a French model (villages temoines).<sup>14</sup> In the Netherlands this original concept was linked to Hofstee's theory of the modern culture pattern. In 1953 a secret report was written which makes clear that Rottevalle was chosen because of its presumed modern culture pattern and Kerkhoven because it came up to the expectation of traditionalism.<sup>15</sup>

The lifestyle of the farmers in Rottevalle was more rational and individualistic than that of the farmers in the Dutch east and south sand soil areas. That's why they seemed to be less occupied by traditional working methods. Furthermore the level of education was higher than the average in The Netherlands. There were class differences, but not as a dominant structure. Small farmers didn't mind to work as labourer. In other words farmers didn't look down on the working class. The progressive attitude of the farmers was one reason to choose Rottevalle. The following arguments were also mentioned: the good co-operation between local farmer unions and the governmental agricultural advisory office, the satisfying co-operation between the different religious groups and the presence of macadamised streets, which made the area accessible for visitors.

Kerkhoven gave in almost all respects a opposite picture. The acceptance of values of the local community dominated instead of individualism. The farmers were conservative, even old-fashioned, and were suspicious about innovations. The authoritarian Catholic religion didn't encourage individualism. Furthermore it prevented the farmers to discuss themes like the very high birth rate. The level of education was remarkably lower than elsewhere in the country. The number of successors was at least two per farm. In comparison with Rottevalle, where the participation from housewives at the farm was rather low, Kerkhoven had more family business. The researchers noticed that the farms in Kerkhoven were rather good examples of the average farm in Noord-Brabant. The presumed backwardness of the people in Kerkhoven was however the decisive reason for selection.

The researcher notified a remarkable difference, when during the experiment he farmers of both villages visited each other. The people from Rottevalle were very interested in the technique used by the Kerkhoven farmers and they discussed extensively about the way they could reduce costs. When the people from Kerkhoven visited Rottevalle however, they just pitiful shake their heads about the Frisian stable,

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<sup>13</sup> *Van voorbeeldorp naar streekverbetering : eindverslag van de voorbeelddorpen Kerkhoven en Rottevalle* (z.p. z.j. [1956]); *Pilot villages and pilot areas in the Netherlands* (z.p. 1957).

<sup>14</sup> *Verslag over de landbouw in Nederland 1953* ('s-Gravenhage 1955), 258.

<sup>15</sup> Centrale Archief Dienst (CAS) Winschoten, Archief ministerie van LNV, RLC Zuidoost-Friesland, C. H. Hoefnagels en J. L. Jessen, *De voorbeelddorpen Kerkhoven en Rottevalle : een nieuwe methode van landbouwvoorlichting* (z.p. 1953).

which in their view were totally unsuitable.<sup>16</sup> This kind of remarks should emphasise the backwardness of the Kerkhoven farmers.

What was the result of the experiment in the villages? In Rottevalle was a so-called propaganda model used. This meant that a part of a farm was shaped in an ideal model and then exhibited for other farmers. Farmers took part in this experiment as individuals. In Kerkhoven however a collective model of advisory was used, which could be linked better to the theories of Hofstee. Maybe the outcome of the experiment was already clear at the start. The continuing of the model used in Rottevalle was rejected. On the other hand the researchers predicted great possibilities for the Kerkhoven-model, but they also pointed at some mistakes that were made.<sup>17</sup> It was especially emphasised that the local leadership should be chosen more carefully in the future. The ones in the village in leading positions (mayor, local representatives of the church, chairmen of the farmer societies) would not have to be automatically the real leaders, as turned out in Kerkhoven. Negative feelings among the farmers towards these formal leaders could easily jump over to the rural development programme. That this didn't happen in Kerkhoven was merely due to the strict direction of the governmental agricultural advice office. The researchers recommended that more insight in the local pattern of power was necessary in the future. Instead of fallen back on the old leaders it would be better to search for new ones, that is to say leaders who have an open mind for innovation and change.<sup>18</sup>

The method of research that was used in the pilot-villages was a mixture of the old sociographic data technique and the interview techniques of the American new sociology, both embedded in the notion of the supposed contradiction between traditional and modern. The pilot-villages were an experiment to look for possibilities to adapt farmers to the modern time and the new values. The advice-officers speculated on the chance that families would change their behaviour because their neighbours did also. This kind of pressure within groups became a structural technique in the pilot-areas. The will to innovate had to be promoted at any cost.

## Critics

The modern culture pattern has chiefly been discussed as a theory. It is essentially to emphasise that this theory uses mentality (change is the standard value) as the fundamental factor to explain processes and not economic (structural) ones. The critics from sociologist appeared in the mid-sixtieth (1963-1967), those from historians ten years later. Those of the sociologists were formulated after two PhD's published thesis in which Hofstee's theory was tested.<sup>19</sup> One of the major criticism on those thesis was that they reconstructed individual social-psychological behaviour and weren't at all a research on social groups. The critics argued that in reality there didn't exist two groups in opposite of each other but a variety of individuals somewhere in between. Following a number of sociologists this kind of cultural research belonged to the discipline of cultural anthropology and not to sociology. One can hear the criticism from the Dutch 'modern' sociology on the old (multidisciplinary) sociographic: "It seems to us that sociological research, that tries to explain social phenomena, not only has to emphasise cultural and psychological facts, but also, and

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<sup>16</sup> Hoefnagels en Jessen, *De voorbeelddorpen*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> *Van voorbeelddorp naar streekverbetering*, 45-46.

<sup>18</sup> *Van voorbeelddorp naar streekverbetering*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> B. Benvenuti, *Farming in cultural change* (Assen 1961); Bergsma, *Op weg naar een nieuw cultuurpatroon*.

maybe above all, structural facts".<sup>20</sup> This kind of critic is very much a product of its time, in later years sociology tended again to grow towards cultural anthropology. Sociologist did again discuss Hofstee's concept of modern cultural pattern in the late seventieth with the result that it was rejected as old-fashioned.<sup>21</sup> The above criticism was strongly projected on the modern cultural pattern as an explaining theory. How far it also was criticised as an applied science, is subject of further research.

The sociologist put forward critic on the modern culture pattern, historians disagreed the way Hofstee described the traditional society. H.K. Roessingh was the first one who rejected the idea of the immobility and unchangeability of the traditional agricultural and pre-industrial society.<sup>22</sup> J. Bieleman proved in his footsteps that agricultural life in a poor province like Drenthe between 1600 and 1800 was much more changing than Hofstee's theory presumed.<sup>23</sup> And P. Priester, who studied the economic agricultural development in the province of Groningen between 1800-1910, showed that the model of explanation wasn't even suitable for the province where Hofstee said he found his historical and empirical evidence.<sup>24</sup> These critics of historians have always been put in the form of a falsification of Hofstee's theory, it never led to a real debate with sociologist.<sup>25</sup> The tendency to reject his vision on traditional society became one of the leitmotifs of the Wageningen agrarian historians, the leading Dutch group in this discipline. They imbedded the agrarian history in the social and economic history with a strong emphasis in analysing long-term structures. History of ideas and mentality did not develop as strong. In that sense we can understand the reaction of the sociologist Q. Munters, an expert on Hofstee's work, on their criticism. He stated that the historical critics always used rational-economic and structural models for the falsifications of Hofstee's concepts, whereas the basis of these concepts was constructed around a cultural model with an important role for actors.<sup>26</sup> In his view it was comparing apples with oranges.

Hofstee probably saw traditional society too much as foreplay of modern society. He suggested an immobile and unchanging society, without studying it thoroughly. This maybe due to the fact that the real subject of research was the *transition* from one society to another. The concept of modern culture pattern as a theory that explains history is today rejected. But the twin concepts traditional-modern as an analytical instrument can still be of great value. The dichotomy between traditional and modern is more or less always present, but it forms changes in time. Hofstee recognised that problem in later years and tried to put the concept of modern culture pattern into a

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<sup>20</sup> A. B. Droogleever Fortuijn en G. J. Kruijer, 'Daling en niveau van de geboortecijfers in Nederland: bijdrage tot een discussie', *Sociologische Gids*, 13 (1966) 154-172.

<sup>21</sup> J. A. I. Coolen, 'De waarde van het begrip 'modern cultuurpatroon' voor onderzoek naar vernieuwingsprocessen', *Sociologische Gids*, 25 (1978) 72-93; A. T. J. Nooij, 'Het belegen cultuurpatroon. Commentaar bij: J. Coolen, De waarde van het begrip 'modern cultuurpatroon' voor onderzoek naar vernieuwingsprocessen', *Sociologische Gids*, 25 (1978) 133-136; J. A. I. Coolen, 'Modern cultuurpatroon, theoretisch perspectief en empirische theorie; antwoord aan A.T.J. Nooij', *Sociologische Gids*, 25 (1978) 137-140.

<sup>22</sup> H. K. Roessingh, *Inlandse tabak. Expansie en concentratie van een handelsgewas in de 17e en 18e eeuw in Nederland* (Wageningen 1976).

<sup>23</sup> J. Bieleman, *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600-1910. Een nieuwe visie op de oude landbouw* (Utrecht 1987).

<sup>24</sup> P. Priester, *De economische ontwikkeling van de landbouw in Groningen 1800-1910* (Groningen 1991), 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> P. Kooij, 'Agrarische geschiedenis in de actualiteit', in: P. Kooij e.a. (red.), *De actualiteit van de agrarische geschiedenis* (Groningen/Wageningen 2000) 1-26.

<sup>26</sup> Q. J. Munters, 'Kwetsbare aspecten van het actorperspectief', *Sociologische Gids*, afl. januari/februari, 43 (1996) 60-68

continuum.<sup>27</sup> In that case one can get only a clear dichotomy when both extreme sides are put in a delimited space of time.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the paper this question will return.

### Style of farming

In the beginning of this paper another theory was mentioned, which is related closely to the concept of modern culture pattern, namely the style of farming. Hofstee discovered that farmers tended to copy their styles of farming. If a farmer used a certain agricultural technique with success, his neighbours would probably start to use the same technique. Styles of farming within a region look therefore very similar.<sup>29</sup> This theory is of importance, because local leaders play a decisive role in that process. Who belonged in a certain community to the group of local leaders differed in each region. Success and/or origin could determine it. In the pilot areas it was therefore for the government essential to choose the right local leaders, that means those who were in favour of change. The agricultural advisory office concluded after the experiment in Kerkhoven that it had to make this selection more thoroughly.

Hofstee introduced the term style of farming first in 1943.<sup>30</sup> During a lecture he argued that in some peatland areas the labour extensive farming had become dominant and therefore small farmers would have less chance to continue their farming style. As a result of tradition and social pressure the small farmers had to take over the dominant style of farming.<sup>31</sup> In 1946, during his inaugural lecture, he illustrated the meaning of the term style of farming by a comparison of two areas in the province of Groningen (Zuidelijk Westerkwartier and Woldstreek). In the first the cattle breeding was dominant, in the other the crop raising. This difference in both areas only occurred after 1850. Hofstee argued that nor physical, nor economical, nor historical-juridical reasons could explain the difference. Hofstee linked the developments in the Woldstreek to those in Groningen. In this province farmers started to put their grasslands under the plough and turned it into arable land at the end of the eighteenth century, merely because of a cattle plague. In the comparable province of Friesland this did not happen. The Woldstreek was after that strongly influenced by the Groningen value, which dictated that a successful farmer had an arable farm. In the Zuidelijk Westerkwartier in the western part of Groningen was however the Frisian value predominant. Hofstee wrote: "It is a well known social phenomena, that whenever in a society a certain lifestyle is accepted by the dominant group, the rest can not and will not back out. This lifestyle gets at that moment a more or less compulsory character. Also our economic life, even in our individualistic society, can not withdraw from such a dominant style. Every more or less coherent group of persons, who have the same type of farm, develops an as normally accepted way of management. Here origins a so called style of farming."<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion may be clear. The structure of the agricultural work and life in an area is not only determined by the visible, but also by the in a group living consciousness and unconsciousness ideals, perceptions and concepts that in their origin are not linked to economic motives. In other words Hofstee argued that style of

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<sup>27</sup> Hofstee, 'Over het modern-dynamisch cultuurpatroon'.

<sup>28</sup> E. W. Hofstee, 'Over het modern-dynamisch cultuurpatroon.(naschrift bij het artikel van Op 't Land)', *Sociologische Gids*, afl. 3 (mei/juni), 13 (1966) 173-175, 142.

<sup>29</sup> E. W. Hofstee, *Over de oorzaken van de verscheidenheid in de Nederlandsche landbouwgebieden (inaugurale rede)* (Groningen /Wageningen 1946).

<sup>30</sup> E. W. Hofstee, *Sociaal-economische problemen der Groninger Veenkoloniën (3 lezingen)* (Assen 1943).

<sup>31</sup> Hofstee, *Sociaal-economische problemen*, 18

<sup>32</sup> Hofstee, *Sociaal-economische problemen*.



farming are connected to collective ideas and values of farmers in an area. A successful farmer, mostly a modern one, can influence that process. Just like in the theory about the modern culture pattern, the social cultural and not the economic explanation is dominant.

One of Hofstee's PhD students, Bruno Benvenuti, developed on the basis of the style of farming theory his so-called TATE-concept (Technical and Administrative Task Enforcement).<sup>33</sup> He observed that identical styles of farming were found hundreds of miles apart. That farmers used the same bulk milk tank in area X was understandable, but why the farmers used exactly the same tanks in area far away could not be explained by the regional style of farming theory. Benvenuti pretended he could clarify it with his TATE concept. According to him it was no longer the farmer who decided about the developments on his farm, but the institutions that were 'build' around. The factory decided about the capacity of the tank, the research institute about the best way to raise crop, the bank about the finance, the government about the rules, the EC about the quota, and so on. The critical sociologist Benvenuti turned out to be a follower of structuralism.. This philosophical movement, that became popular during the sixties and seventieth, reduces the meaning of actors in favour of predominating structures. The structuralism versus the actor-orientated analysis was one of the major disputes in the eighties among Dutch sociologists. In later years Benvenuti tried to reconcile his TATE concept with the actor-orientated analysis, that regain popularity in the social sciences.<sup>34</sup>

In the eightieth and ninetieth Van der Ploeg, who holds Hofstee's old chair at the University of Wageningen since 1993, developed Benvenuti's ideas further.<sup>35</sup> He tried to find alternates for the 'powerless' farmer. His starting point remained a rather strict structuralist analysis. He introduced the concept *virtual farmer*. Following this idea there has taken a change in the decision-making on farms. In the beginning this was done on the basis of historical experience. Present and past overlapped each other. We recognise in this Hofstee's idea of traditional farmer. In the period there after, in the modern society, a concept of differentiated prospects on the basis of known *resources* dominated. The past is no longer relevant, because the present determines the future. In post-modern society the role is reversed. The future starts to determine the present. A so-called expert system (system that covers the knowledge on agriculture) plays a crucial role. These expert systems create 'a domain of the indisputable'. They reduce the different future options to one exclusive on the basis of the knowledge created by the system. This means that all other options are rejected and declared not legitimate. The *virtual farmer* is the farmer as imagined by the expert system, not the one he (or she) is in reality.

Van der Ploeg is more radical in his analysis than Hofstee and Benvenuti. Hofstee considered the rise of the modern farmer from a functionalistic and modernistic point of view. This type of farmer was needed to play a leading role in the traditional community, which had to be adapted to the new agricultural policy (rationalisation). Benvenuti created the picture of a puppet farmer that was directed by the institution

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<sup>33</sup> Bruno Benvenuti, *Geschriften over landbouw, structuur en technologie (Ingeleid, bewerkt en vertaald door Jan Douwe van der Ploeg)* (Wageningen 1991)

<sup>34</sup> B. Benvenuti en J. Frouwes, 'De dialectiek van de autonomie en systeemintegratie in de landbouw naar een synthese van structuralisme en actor-oriëntatie in de rurale sociologie', *Tijdschrift voor sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek in de landbouw*, afl. 4, 13 (1998) 212-220.

<sup>35</sup> J. D. van der Ploeg, *Over de betekenis van verscheidenheid. Inaugurale rede uitgesproken op 25 maart 1993 bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar in de Rurale Sociologie aan de Landbouwwuniversiteit te Wageningen*. (z.p. [Wageningen] 2002[z.j, 1993]); J. D. van der Ploeg, *De virtuele boer* (Assen 1999).

around. At least in theory this farmer had to be capable of freeing himself. In Van der Ploegs analysis the farmer is no more than a hologram of the expert system, the really existing farmer had disappeared into another dimension. In this dimension Van der Ploeg tries to find alternatives for farmers by emphasising the aspect of diversity. This approach has lately been described as post-modern constructivism. The title of Van der Ploegs inaugural speech (*About the meaning of diversity*) is a variation on the title of the speech his predecessor gave fifty years earlier: *About the causes of the diversity in the Dutch rural areas*.<sup>36</sup> Van der Ploeg emphasises that good technology and knowledge is of great importance for the development of agriculture, but they are not the only determinants. For example, to what extent a farmer is depending on the market is determined by the degree he can produce his own resources. In reality there are more options and strategies than the one the expert system claims. Van der Ploeg states: "The once almost universal looking grow-model is unable to cover the complex reality of the rural environment".<sup>37</sup> With this phrase he distanced himself from the modernistic view on agricultural development.

### **From family strategy to agrarian entrepreneur**

Hofstee's optimistic vision on the new farmer has disappeared in Benvenuti's and Van der Ploegs concepts. In Van der Ploegs analysis Hofstee's ideas became part of the dominant expert system. From this point of view I tried to analyse Hofstee's theories. So, I am not interested in the falsifications of his theories, but in the way it was integrated in the expert system. My attention is especially attracted by the way the farmer is judged in his role as entrepreneur. R. Bergsma, a former PhD student of Hofstee, described the role of small farmers in a book concerning the reaction of Frisian farmers towards the modern culture pattern as follows: "More important than the circumstantial differences are in my view the differences in mentality between big and small farmers. The small farmer is much less an entrepreneur than the big farmer, mainly because of the totally different traditions. The small farmer doesn't see his farm as a business in which he should maximise profit, but much more as a possibility to lead a 'free' existence. In his mentality the small farmer is much the same as the old-fashioned hard working labourer. He does not remind us of a modern entrepreneur. The fact that he still is in the same position as a small entrepreneur, which forces him to carry risks without having too much fighting spirit, causes nowadays, as the working class has gained a rather good and sure existence, easily an unease that restrains the progressiveness of the small farmer".<sup>38</sup> Bergsma hit the essence of the problem in the pilot-areas. Who studies the intentions of the different actors can detect that finally one (implicit) goal dominated: the small farmer had to become entrepreneur. This resulted after some decades in a very specific form of entrepreneur. Benvenuti as well as Van der Ploeg (apart from his view on the future) have described an agrarian entrepreneur that is fully embedded in rules and institutions. Because there is no way outside this framework, this type of entrepreneur is very transparent.

In my thesis the basic concept of Hofstee – traditional farmer becomes modern farmer - still is important. But the transition from traditional to modern should not be judged from a normative point of view, but be seen as one that is embedded in historical situation. I am interested in the choices (strategies) of farmers and their families, in the foundations of these choices and in the way the strategies were

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<sup>36</sup> Hofstee, *Over de oorzaken*; Ploeg, *Over de betekenis van verscheidenheid*

<sup>37</sup> Ploeg, *Over de betekenis van verscheidenheid*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Bergsma, *Op weg naar een nieuw cultuurpatroon*, 209.

influenced from outside. I don't suppose a 'historical prescribed necessity' of those choices. For example, returning from 'modern' techniques to traditional solutions does not necessarily to be interpreted in terms of decline, but have to be analysed in terms of changing strategies. In this view a farmer who uses traditional, nature-friendly ways of weed control would not be an old fashioned farmer (as he would be in the concept of Hofstee) but an innovating. In the theory of Hofstee the word change is linked exclusively to modern farmers: the concepts traditional and change exclude each other. In this we recognise the normative aspect of Hofstee theory: the rise of the modern farmer was necessary and inevitable. In order to escape from this kind of normative thinking we introduce the concepts agrarian family strategy and agrarian entrepreneur strategy. This concept is not really new. In an article that was published in 1990 by the rural sociologist H. de Haan en A. Nooij was written: "The framework of ideas in the culture pattern theory had similarities with the progressive ideology of agrarian entrepreneur, as this was promoted by liberals and social-democrats in those days".<sup>39</sup> Both authors recognised this also as an underlying problem.

Why and how tried the government to turn the dominant agrarian family strategy among small farmers into an agrarian entrepreneur strategy in the pilot-areas? That is one of the central research questions in my thesis. The concepts agrarian family strategy and agrarian entrepreneur strategy are chosen as global indicators. To prevent misunderstanding two comments have to be made.

In the first place agrarian family strategy shouldn't be confused with family business. A very large part of Dutch farms are still owned by families, but this doesn't mean that a family strategy is dominant. Nor should one presume that the agrarian family strategy has nothing to do with producing for the markets. The autarkic farmer is (at least in the Netherlands) a mythological figure. The object of an agrarian family strategy is to maintain the farm in favour of the successor. An agrarian entrepreneur strategy aims to maximise profit. It can be described as follows: "...the deliberation about the choices that a agrarian entrepreneur has to make about the organisation, the financing and the buy and sell of means of productions and products, with the goal to realise his objects as good as possible in the given situation".<sup>40</sup>

Another comment on the use of the concept family strategy is necessary. It doesn't refer directly to the way this is used within some sociological theories or within the discipline of family history.<sup>41</sup> In those theories the concrete family is the starting point of analysis. In my thesis the farm as business is the starting point. Agrarian family strategy has only a meaning *in relation with* agrarian entrepreneur. Both are two extreme points on a scale. In other words: two types with between them a rich variety of really existing strategies. Both types can be - on the basis of literature - described in opposite features. Sum up all of them would give an extensive list. That is why I divide the features in three moments: sources, activities and goals. Sources cover the structure of the farm and the context in which it works. That can be as well regional orientated, as national or international. It is comparable with the concept of the style of farming. The category of goals can be described as the configuration of motives to exploit the sources. So this can vary from trying to maximise profit to running a farm

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<sup>39</sup> H. J. de Haan en A. T. J. Nooij, 'Het gezinsbedrijf als politiek en wetenschappelijk begrip: ideaalbeelden rondom de boer en zijn bedrijf in Nederland', *Sociologische Gids*, afl. 3, 5 (1990) 243-262.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Renkema, *De studie van het agrarisch ondernemerschap in perspectief* (Wageningen 1986) 1.

<sup>41</sup> Zie bijvoorbeeld: A. Knotter, 'Inleiding', in: J. Kok e.a. (red.), *Levensloop en levenslot: arbeidsstrategieën van gezinnen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Groningen/Wageningen 1999) 1-13.

as a hobby. Activities are the way sources are organised to realise the goals. Essential for this research is that the government can manipulate all three of these moments. For example, land consolidation programmes can be seen as a way to influence the source or the structure of the farm. Introducing subsidiaries is a method to manipulate the goals and activities. The social guidance advisory in the pilot areas has to be considered an attempt to change the goal of the small farmers.

The thesis tries to prove among others that the rural development programme has to be seen as a shift of emphasis from agrarian family strategy towards agrarian entrepreneur strategy. The government propagated to loan from banks instead of farmer's own family. As a result of rationalisation and specialisation the farm-orientated style was transformed into a market-orientated style. Instead of a so-called organic orientation on family and region, the need for organisational network grew, in which the farmer was linked to national and international networks.<sup>42</sup> That is why working on the basis of scientific models (expert system) grew rapidly. Remarkably are also the efforts to redefine the private and business domain as two segregated objects. This resulted in a new kind of advisory work: the economic-social advisory. This redefinition can also be seen as a shift from the family strategy towards an entrepreneur orientated strategy. But above all stood the change in goal: not the well being of the successor, but to maximise profit became top priority.

## Epilogue

I will summarise this paper in four points.

1. Hofstee introduced the modern culture pattern as a historical theory, which described the transition from a traditional society towards a modern society. The readiness of actors to change was essential in this concept. Sociologists as well as historians criticised and rejected the theory. One of the major critics was that the traditional society as presumed by this theory could not be found. It turned out to be an ideal-type.
2. The style of farming theory has stayed a stable value within rural sociology, although its interpretation changed over the years. This has less to do with the change of the styles themselves, but more the changing sociological insights. Hofstee interpreted style of farming as a functionalistic and modernistic concept. Benvenuti emphasised the deterministic structural side and Van der Ploeg is looking in post-modern constructivism for answers.
3. When the rural development programme in the pilot areas is considered to be an ideological transition from family strategy towards agrarian entrepreneur strategy, we should find the traces of this process in the advisory programmes that were used in those days. This is true for the (implicit) goals of these programmes as well as for their execution. In the end they didn't want to change the farmer (as Hofstee presumed), but the farm business.
4. There are three ways in which I 'meet' the sociologists. In the first place as actors in historical process, in their role as social engineers. More or less in the same way I meet them in the actual debate on rural renewal. And finally I have to redefine their theories in to usable historical concepts.

Groningen, February 4th 2002.

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<sup>42</sup> Zie in dit verband ook: C. D. Saal, *Sociale dynamiek. Structuurverandering in de plattelandsamenleving. Rede* (Groningen 1952); C. D. Saal, *Het boerengezin in Nederland* (Assen 1958).

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